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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 January 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Please recycle

ID with SR on Freedom Religion and Belief Oppression of the Shia in Saudi Arabia

As a religious minority, the Shia have always been subject to systematic discrimination and persecution in Saudi Arabia 1. Unfortunately, the Human Rights Council has not taken any serious step to address the suppression of Shia in Saudi Arabia yet.

The Saudi Arabia government has not taken practical steps to eliminate the widespread discrimination against Shia, despite the criticism expressed by the world2 and international human rights organizations3 toward the breaches of Shia human rights in Saudi Arabia. The Shia human rights defenders suffer from various forms of violence including, arbitrary detentions, long term imprisonments without trial, and summary executions. Moreover, there are reports of destruction of Shia historical sites, historical identity, as well as their towns and houses.

Deteriorating situation of human rights defenders in Saudi Arabia

According to the latest report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and belief on second of January, 2018, More than 60 prominent religious figures, writers, journalists, academics, and civic activists are reported to have been detained in Saudi Arabia since September, 4 adding to the number of cases already referred to as sources of concern by the UN experts. The report criticizes the country's continued persecution of human rights activists and critics despite being elected as a member of the Human Rights Council in 2016. 5

The report also blames the Saudi Arabia for the new wave of arrests since September 2017 as well as the States' failure to implement the two opinions announced by the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention (A/HRC/WGAD/2015/38 and A/HRC/WGAD/2017/63), that decides 10 individuals are arbitrarily detained in Saudi Arabia. 6

While various reports of international human rights organizations about arbitrary detentions in Saudi Arabia indicate that a high number of the detainees are Shia human rights defenders7, the Special Rapporteur on minority Rights has not mentioned the Shia minority, at least in the reports offered within the last two years.8

Striving for their right to life

The Shia in Saudi Arabia are in the worst possible situation in comparison to other minority around Muslim communities, since strive to be identified as a minority. Wahhabi school of thought that has a great influence in the political system of Saudi Arabia, considers Shiism a deviation from Islam and believes that the Shia deserve the most severe forms of punishment, in a way that the Salafi and Wahhabi clerics, both in Saudi Arabia and inside terrorist groups such as ISIL and al-Qaeda, allow the killing of Shia and identify them as the worst enemies of God9. Therefore the Shia's main challenge in Saudi Arabia is not to protect their political and social rights, but to defend their right to life and to combat to be identified as a minority with the right to life.10

1 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/alastair-crooke/isis-wahhabism-saudi-arabia_b_5717157.html
2 http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22570&LangID=E
3 http://www.gc4hr.org/news/index/country/3
4 http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22570&LangID=E
5 http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22570&LangID=E
6 http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=22570&LangID=E
7 http://www.gc4hr.org/news/index/country/3
8 http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Minorities/SRMinorities/Pages/Annual.aspx
9http://www.alifta.net/fatawa/fatawaDetails.aspx?languagename=en&BookID=14&View=Page&PageNo=1&PageID=5429
https://vimeo.com/56079107
https://www.vox.com/2015/1/26/7877619/saudi-arabia-questions
10 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/alastair-crooke/isis-wahhabism-saudi-arabia_b_5717157.html

Despite living in the east of the country with oil rich lands, they have profited little from the country's wealth. Some 10 percent of Saudi Arabia's 30 million citizens are Shia who has never had the right to protest.11 the last time they got the chance to rally to the streets against the government was during the so-called Arab Spring in 2011, that was severely suppressed by security forces.

The absence of freedom of religion

The Saudi Arabia government does not respect religious freedom in law and practice. The Muslims who do not obey the government's interpretation of Islam face significant political, economic, legal, social, and religious discrimination, including limited employment and educational opportunities, under-representation in official institutions and restrictions on religious practice. The members of Shia who claim their human rights or exercise their rights face sever punishments. The government has sentenced several Shia clerics to death, 12 just in one case 47 Shias executed in January 2016 one of whom was prominent Sheikh Nimr al-Nimr.13

Forced displacements of Shia in Saudi Arabia

Shia Muslims cannot enjoy citizens' rights equal to the majority of Saudi Arabia and there has been various reports criticizing the systemic state discrimination against the minority group.14 Apart from the limited opportunities for Shia to exercise their political rights, there have been various reports of forced displacements and evictions of Shia and demolitions of their houses; a famous case of this was in Al-Masora neighborhood in Awamia, on 5th of April, 2017.15 The Saudi Arabia's forces razed the historic quarter of a largely Shia town after months of clashes with gunmen in the area. The move was the culmination of a three-month government campaign to root out gunmen from the 400-year-old Musawara neighborhood of Awamiya. The area Musawara is home to up to 3,000 people.16

Summary executions of the Shia

In the last years, there have been many cases of death penalty against Shia citizens in Saudi Arabia. Abbas al-Hassan is a Saudi citizen and father of four from the Shia majority town of al-Ahsa in the Eastern Province, who has been convicted and sentenced to death in an unfair trial. He is at imminent risk of execution by the Saudi government.

Al-Hassan was arrested in June 2013, along with 31 other men for alleged ties to Islamic Republic of Iran and espionage. The Saudi government held him incommunicado for over three months, during which time they tortured him into confessing to the charges against him. The charges include treason and support of terrorism, as well as blatant political and religious charges – recruiting individuals in the media to hinder the reputation of the state, supporting riots and protests, and supporting the spread of Shia doctrine. The Saudi government held al-Hassan in detention for more than three years while preparing the case against him, yet demanded that the defense be ready to proceed in only three weeks.17 On 6 December 2016, the Specialized Criminal Court in Riyadh sentenced al-Hassan and 14 other men to death, a decision which was upheld by the Appeals Court in July 2017.

On December 21, 2017, Ali al-Nimr turned 23-years-old while he was on death row in the country's prison. It was his sixth birthday in prison after being arrested in February 2012 for participating in a peaceful pro-democracy rally in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province.

Ali al-Nimr was just 17-years-old when he was arrested on 14 February 2012 in Qatif, a town in Saudi Arabia known to be a center for pro-democracy demonstrations. After arresting him, officers of Saudi Arabia's General Intelligence Directorate interrogated him and tortured him. Ali signed a confession that one of his interrogators wrote for him, even

11 http://www.dw.com/en/is-saudi-arabia-waging-war-on-its-shiite-minority/a-40045513

12 http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2016/1/2/saudi-arabia-executes-47-including-prominent-shia-cleric.html

13 http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/saudi-executes-47-including-top-shiite-cleric-1355312477

14 https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/09/03/denied-dignity/systematic-discrimination-and-hostility-toward-saudi-shia-citizens

15 http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=21482&LangID=E

16 http://www.cnn.com/2017/08/12/middleeast/saudi-arabia-awamiya/index.html

17 http://www.adhrb.org/2017/12/profiles-in-persecution-abbas-al-hassan

though he did not understand what he was signing. Throughout his interrogation and prior to his trial Saudi authorities denied Ali the right to speak with a lawyer.18

Authorities referred Ali's case to the Specialized Criminal Court (SCC), the country's national security court system that is responsible for trying terrorists. Ali had his first hearing in mid-December 2013, where he was charged with participating in demonstrations, chanting slogans hostile to Saudi Arabia, and possessing and throwing Molotov cocktails. In late-May 2014 after six trial sessions, the SCC in Jeddah sentenced him to death. His trial was conducted in secret, and authorities did not allow his family or lawyer to be present, nor did authorities tell them about the court proceedings.19

Munir Al Adam is one of almost 46 political prisoners at risk of execution in Saudi Arabia for spurious charges related to peaceful expression, assembly, association, and belief that do not meet the threshold of "most serious crimes." Security forces arrested Munir on 8 April 2012 near Awamiyah in the Eastern Province. While in detention, officials held him in solitary confinement and tortured him, forcing him to confess to a number of crimes. As a result of the torture, Munir lost hearing in one ear. Though a doctor recommended surgery, authorities denied him the operation, causing him to become permanently deaf in that ear.20

Recommendations:

The Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) is for the consideration of all human rights violations around the world and especially that of Shia minorities in Saudi Arabia, and requests the Special Rapporteur on the rights of minorities to visit Saudi Arabia as soon as possible and to report on the situation of Saudi Shia citizens in her next report. Such report can emphasize on Human Rights Council's strong determination to fight against violation of minority rights for all groups of minorities around the globe and to the credibility and unbiasedness of the Council.

ODVV also calls on the United Nations Human Rights Council to address the systematic violation of the Shia minority rights in Saudi Arabia. Because efforts to destroy the culture, history, and identity of the Shia are seriously followed by the Saudi government.

We invite all UN members to end the membership of the Saudi Arabia in Human Rights Council due to the oppressive behavior of its government against minorities, political activists, and human rights defenders.

18 http://www.adhrb.org/2017/12/ali-al-nimr-spends-another-birthday-on-death-row/

19 http://www.adhrb.org/2017/12/ali-al-nimr-spends-another-birthday-on-death-row/

20 http://www.adhrb.org/2017/12/adhrb-and-esohr-condemn-munir-al-adams-impending-death-sentence/